



**OPENING DAY REMARKS**  
**by Senate President Robert Bunda**  
**JANUARY 18, 2006**

Aloha and welcome to the 2006 Regular Session of the Hawaii State Legislature. I'd like to take just a moment to personally welcome back Governor Linda Lingle, who recently made a goodwill trip to my cultural homeland, the Philippines. She led a distinguished delegation that renewed and reinforced the ties between the people of Hawaii and the Philippines. Mabuhay, Governor Lingle.

While in the Northern Province of Ilocos-Sur, the Governor unveiled a statue dedicated to the memory of the Sakadas, the first group of plantation workers to leave the Philippines for Hawaii in 1906. Thousands more would follow, including my grandparents who arrived in Hawaii in 1921.

Today, I would like to acknowledge their son, my Uncle, Manuel Bunda. He was recently honored as a "sakada" as part of the centennial anniversary celebration of Filipino immigration to Hawaii.

Like other ethnic groups who came here looking for a better life, Filipino immigrants, like Manuel Bunda, brought with them not only their culture, but a certain attitude toward work and opportunity, a strong belief in their own capabilities and an underlying trust in their fellow man.

But what strikes me most is something else that all of Hawaii's immigrants, past and present, share. And that is an even stronger sense of obligation to their children and to the future. All of their actions, motivations, and aspirations were in some way connected to their children.

Today, as the grandchildren and great grandchildren of those immigrants, we have much that can divide us. But we should never let those differences blind us to what we inherited from them, and what still holds us together—and that is our common desire to shape a better future for our children.

There is a passage from former Governor Ariyoshi's book, "With Obligation to All," that is never far from my mind. In it, he writes about power and public office in terms of a "stewardship."

*(Quote) What we have today does not belong to us without qualification. It is ours to care for, enjoy, and make better before passing it on. We are stewards of elective office. We are stewards of our jobs, institutions, and communities, just as we are stewards of the land and stewards of all our resources. (unquote).*

These are wise words to live by and sound advice to guide us during this coming session. As we all know, we are just temporary occupants of these seats. The nameplates on our office doors slide out just as easily as they slid in.

Just as our counterparts did in Governor Ariyoshi's time, we must resist the temptation of power and deal with issues on their own merit.

What I am talking about, my friends, is politics, pure and simple.

Now I'm a realist and I understand the role of legitimate jousting between political parties, as well as within factions of the parties, themselves. But there comes a time, when all the posturing and positioning become counterproductive and even detrimental, and there comes a time when paying lip service to conciliation and cooperation is not enough. To achieve our goals, we must put aside our differences and truly work together.

I believe the voters of this state are smart enough to know the difference between a good idea and a bad one; between shortsighted solutions and far-sighted vision.

At the end of the day, I don't think they really care where a good idea comes from. It's tough enough to find sound and realistic long-term solutions. We should not restrict our choices because some of them don't come with the right political label.

A good idea is a good idea. Let's honestly look for them, and, if they are sound, let's take them to heart.

More than any other area, education deserves that kind of an honest look. When Superintendent Pat Hamamoto took over the reins of the Department of Education, she promised to move forward on improving our schools, if we gave her the tools to do the job. Have we given her the tools she needs to do her job? Have we given our teachers the support they need to do their job?

Our teachers face enormous challenges, such as a maze of unfunded federal and court-ordered mandates, children from immigrant families struggling to catch up to their peers, and school facilities in disrepair. With each new challenge, schools must justify the money requested, and even then, are usually forced to make do with less. They are stretched thin and understandably frustrated.

Right now, we have the resources to make a significant difference in our schools. There is no reason why we cannot provide stable financial support to enable the DOE to systematically eliminate its repair and maintenance backlog. We stand ready to do this.

Inside the classroom, we can make a difference by reducing the actual class size and providing enrichment programs for all students. Every student, at every level of ability, deserves the attention they need to thrive in our educational system.

If we are concerned about the future, we need to redouble our efforts to provide students with strong math and science backgrounds. Unfortunately, less than half of eighth grade students in the United States today have math teachers who majored in the subject or studied math for teacher certification. We all recognize the need to prepare our students for a future where technology is integrated into all aspects of modern life—where competition is not only fierce but global, with students in countries like China and India outperforming our own. I say we best prepare them by providing them with well-qualified math and science teachers.

If we are concerned about the future, we also need to take a good hard look at economic development. Today, we have a golden opportunity in the area of biotechnology and other businesses related to life sciences that offer tremendous potential for Hawaii. There is no better investment in our future than support for the ongoing research and development at the John A. Burns School of Medicine and the Cancer Research Center of Hawaii. The future is at our doorstep. Let's invite it in.

If we are concerned about the future, we need a comprehensive and long-range approach to dealing with our energy requirements. We need to support research and development for alternative fuels, such as ethanol, hydrogen and solar energy. Hawaii is already recognized as a premier demonstration site for the development of a hydrogen-based economy. We must continue to pursue this long-term goal of developing sustainable energy resources, as well as the protection of a sustainable environment.

Sustainability also means support for our farmers, even as agriculture transitions from the plantation era to a more diversified and streamlined industry.

If we are concerned about the future, we also need to take a pragmatic, as well as an honest look, at housing. It remains one of our greatest challenges. Because, while home ownership has always been the dream of most families, we know here in Hawaii, demand will always outpace supply, forcing home ownership beyond the reach of many.

But there are other ways of providing housing for those who need assistance the most. One of them is by addressing the rental housing market. In addition, we know there is a direct correlation between the number of homeless individuals and the availability of rental housing.

We need to increase the supply of rental housing and provide incentives to landlords to keep existing units in the rental market. We need to make more state lands available for rental housing in our urban core. We certainly don't need to sell off public lands without very careful review, whether they are in Kakaako or anywhere else.

If we are concerned about the future, we also need to reduce the tax burden of our citizens, a burden that has become more and more untenable. I advocated tax reform last session. The current budget surplus makes an even stronger case for tax reform.

In the past, we've resisted implementing any changes to our tax structure because of a lack of revenues to support them. What we need is not just a one-time rebate, but significant and permanent tax reform.

We now have the rarest of opportunities to do it without sacrificing spending on education or other priority areas. We need a serious review of the cumulative tax burden that we have placed on our citizens, income taxes and property taxes being at the top of a long list of tax liabilities. As Ben Franklin once said, "in this world, nothing is certain but death and taxes." I would like to note for the record that death only comes once. We can't do much to change that but we can do something about taxes.

To properly attend to the people's business, I said earlier that we needed to rise above petty politics. We also need to truly listen to what people are saying—and to be receptive and responsive to those messages.

The recent public outcry over the move to subdivide Waimea Valley on the North Shore is a clear case in point. The community cried out against such a move, but more importantly, it mobilized an effort to save the valley. To do so, they enlisted the support of all levels of government along with the private sector to form a partnership that worked. It is an example of what can happen when people make the connection between what we do here and what is important to them.

Actions and decisions made by us here are directly linked to the quality of life for people today and to what we leave as a legacy for our children tomorrow.

To those citizens who are willing to take a stand on behalf of generations to come, I congratulate you. You are an inspiration and true stewards of the future.

As we begin the 2006 Legislative Session, I pray for a compassionate and productive session. My wish for all of us is the wisdom and fortitude to render sound policy decisions that will benefit the people. I believe we are capable of resolving even the most persistent of problems, if we set aside politics and power struggles and simply strive to do the right thing for the right reasons.

Colleagues, we've got work to do. Let's get to it.

Mahalo and Aloha.